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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO NSC FOR ADAM STERLING

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SUBJECT: YOUTH MOVEMENT: THE PARTIES TARGET YOUNG VOTERS IN
PREPARATION FOR 2009-10 ELECTIONS

Classified By: P/E COUNSELOR ERIC V. GAUDIOSI; REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (SBU) With the 2009 European Parliamentary elections fast approaching, Hungary's political parties are working hard to identify and mobilize potential supporters.

GENERATION WHY?

12. (C) The parties are principally focusing on the same narrow band of young voters, with officials across the political spectrum privately expressing concern that younger Hungarians) themselves a shrinking demographic at a time of declining birth rates even in developed areas) are increasingly tuning out. Although Orban has expressed his confidence that "the future belongs to FIDESZ" given polling indicating a conservative shift among Hungarians under the age of 30, others on the right are not so sure. Polling shows what one observer described as "apathy as the biggest winner," and conservative commentator Tamas Magyarics believes that Orban's assertion is "based on the assumption that the young won't change their politics (something Orban himself has certainly done." Anita Orban, a young political columnist and one-time party stalwart, has grown increasingly disenchanted with FIDESZ's present leadership, confessing that she is becoming "more pragmatic as the years go by."

13. (C) The parties are gearing up for fierce competition for young voters. FIDESZ has not one but two youth-oriented groups, with estimates of their membership ranging up to 14,000. Ibolya David's MDF has done well with its outreach efforts, and the party is making a great deal of its stand on fiscal responsibility and its commitment to invest in Hungary's future. SZDSZ rivals Janos Koka and Gabor Fodor have each started youth groups within the party. Fodor has increased his public profile with his early performance as Environment Minister, which has made him a prominent player on the issues he believes can mobilize younger voters. For his part, Koka believes his own youth gives him an inside track at attracting the support his party desperately needs, but may find it difficult to capture young supporters without further alienating the SZDSZ's traditional base. Curiously, it is the MSZP, led by former Communist Youth Association President Gyurcsany, which seems least interested in cultivating younger voters. Given its own aging base, this oversight may come back to haunt them.

HUNGARY'S ENDANGERED SPECIES: SWING VOTERS

14. (C) Many politicians here believe that voters are born, not made. Looking back on the 2006 elections, some still joke that "both swing voters voted for Gyurcsany." Although some polling suggests a new willingness by MSZP voters to support the opposition, FIDESZ VP Zoltan Pokorni estimates that no more than 10 percent of voters can be swayed to vote across party lines, anticipating that his party will "lose as

well as gain support" if this happens. Hungarian campaigns tend to focus less on issues and more on ideology, mobilizing the parties' respective bases rather than reaching out to new target audiences. As MSZP supporters demonstrated in last year's local elections, Hungarian voters have been more likely to stay home than to swing their support to other parties. That said, the smaller parties especially cannot afford to leave any stone unturned in their search for votes.

MORE HUNGARIANS = MORE VOTERS

15. (C) Confronting greater competition for a shrinking electorate, politicians here may once again turn to "new" Hungarians as the greatest potential source of new Hungarian voters. The parties have been more vocal of late in expressing their solidarity with ethnic Hungarians abroad, and President Solyom has put dual citizenship on the agenda of his meetings with Ukrainian and Croatian officials. Statements which downplay the significance of the issue, such as recent comments from both Gyurcsany and Koka emphasizing a common future for all Hungarians within the EU, have met with sharp criticism, and the right remains convinced that securing voting rights for ethnic Hungarians would make them the "permanent majority." As the Spring referendum and the next national elections approach, we cannot preclude an attempt to resurrect this issue as Hungary's parties grow less concerned with regional repercussions and more focused on their own political fortunes.

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